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A Modern Folktale Featuring Jeeva and Jatin

CHASING THE PLASTIC PISACH



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Illustrations by Arka Prabha Roy Chowdhury






“Don't leave that plastic bag on the table, Jeeva!” said Mother. “Roll it up and put it in the storeroom.”

“Why, Ma?” asked Jeeva, who never tired of asking questions.

“Plastic bags are so light they fly away when the breeze blows,” said Mother. “And then they get stuck in trees, and look ugly. Or they fall near plants and prevent air and water from reaching their roots. Sometimes animals eat them and become sick. When they are not stored carefully, plastic bags can be the very devil!”

Jeeva looked at the plastic bag fluttering on the bench. “A devil,” she murmured. “It looks like a





devil, a Pisach! Look at its glowing green eyes and its flappy wings!”

Mother got up, laughing. “Plastic Pisach, indeed!” she said. “Just put it away and go on with your work!”

But Jeeva and her brother Jatin did not even hear her. As they watched in fascination and horror, the green plastic bag on the bench became a ghastly green-eyed, flappy-armed, green-toothed devil! It blew its cheeks out and with a terrible “tee hee hee!” took off into the air. As it sailed out of the room, it winked its green eyes at the children.

“Catch him, Jatin,” Jeeva cried. “Catch the Plastic Pisach! It's dangerous!”

Now, Jeeva and Jatin loved the village of Jhilmil, where they lived with their parents. They were anxious to see that it remained safe and beautiful. So they ran out of the house to see what they could do. But the green Plastic Pisach sailed away merrily, far, far ahead of them. At first, it floated over the meadows. Then it flopped to the ground right under the nose of Shanti the cow. Shanti and her friends were busy grazing in the meadow, and she did not

notice the green devil that was lying in the grass.

Jeeva and Jatin reached her just as she began munching the bag, along with the grass.

Jeeva caught Shanti by the ears. "Shanti, spit everything out!" she screamed.

Shanti was surprised. "What is it?" she wanted to ask but her mouth was full and all she managed was a loud "Bbbb...bmooo!"

"You are eating a plastic bag and it's bad for you!" cried Jeeva.

Shanti spat out all that she had been chewing.


"Oww...ww!" howled the Plastic Pisach.

"Don't you ever see what you eat, Shanti?" asked Jatin.

"Well, the meadow is full of litter, which no one ever clears. So it isn't always easy to see what we're eating," Shanti said sadly.

Jatin looked around him.

Plastic bags, cigarette cartons, crumpled paper, ice



cream cups and all sorts of rubbish were strewn, here and there, on the grass.

“We must do something about it,” thought Jatin. He picked up some plastic bags, and then remembered the Plastic Pisach. “I must pick it up before...” But there was a sudden gush of wind and the Plastic Pisach took off!

“Oh, no!” cried Jatin, darting after it. “How stupid of me!”

“Don't worry. Big Bargadh will catch it and hold it safe for us,” said Jeeva, running behind him.

Big Bargadh was the banyan tree on the river-bank. When Jatin and Jeeva reached it, they found the women of Jhilmil washing their clothes in the river. Their babies were lying in the shade of the tree. And the Plastic Pisach? Sure enough, it was stuck on the topmost branch of the tree.

“Got you!” yelled Jatin, shaking his fist at it. “Now you can't escape.”

“But how will you get him, Jatin?” asked Jeeva. “Are you going to climb Big Bargadh? You'll only fall. Pisach is right at the top!”



The women stopped to look at them. "There are dozens of plastic bags in the village. Go and pick up one of them!" said someone.

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"They have nothing better to do!" shouted another. All of them laughed.

But the children did not even smile.

"This is serious," said Jatin. "We must catch Plastic Pisach before he can do any harm."

"May I help you?" asked a familiar voice. They turned around and saw their friend, Pancharangi the parakeet. Her bright green feathers, which were flecked with dashes of pink, orange and purple, glowed in the sunshine. "I can get that plastic bag for you!"

"That would be great!" squealed Jeeva.

So Pancharangi quickly flew to the top of the tree.

"I just hope Pisach does not fly away once Pancharangi sets it free!" sighed Jatin.

As they looked on, Pancharangi began attacking Pisach with her beak. A few pecks and Pisach was free. And just as Jatin had feared, it sailed away



again.

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“Oh, Pancharangi, you let it go! Catch it, catch it!” screamed Jeeva.

But the wind died down and Pisach floated to the huge heap of garbage near Big Bargadh. A villager was setting fire to the heap and stoking it with a long stick.

We must grab that Pisach!” gasped Jatin, running hard.

“Why?” asked Jeeva, trying to keep pace with him. “Let him burn! Good riddance!” She did not know that burning plastics releases all sorts of poisons into the air.

When they drew near the heap, they had quite a shock. On the heap were loads of plastic bags. “Let's do something, Jeeva!” shouted Jatin. But suddenly, the wind rose and lifted the plastic bags up in the air.

They swirled round the children in a weird dance and then began to wrap themselves tightly around Jeeva and Jatin.



The children tried in vain to push away the plastic devils. "I feel... hot!" cried Jeeva.

"Can't breathe," gasped Jatin. "Can't talk...!"


"Help!" screamed Jeeva as her brother's face began to turn blue.

Fortunately, Pancharangi had seen what had happened, and had called out to her friends for help. They were just in time! Peck, peck went the birds, and in a few moments some of the plastic bags were in shreds, and the others fell to the ground.

"Thank you, Pancharangi," wheezed the children. "You saved us!" Slowly they gathered up the bags and cleared the mess. "We must find out how to dispose of plastics properly," said Jatin, thoughtfully. "I wonder what we can do with the loads of plastic bags we all have..."

"I know!" said Jeeva, excitedly. "We must use them, again and again. Keep them so busy they can't fly off! You know, like those devils in the stories grandma tells us. Devils must be kept busy all the time, or they will harm others!"

"Smart girl!" said Jatin.



“Jeeva, isn't it funny that plastics can be really useful too. Look at all the plastic things we use every day! And remember the plastics in the big hospital in the city...”

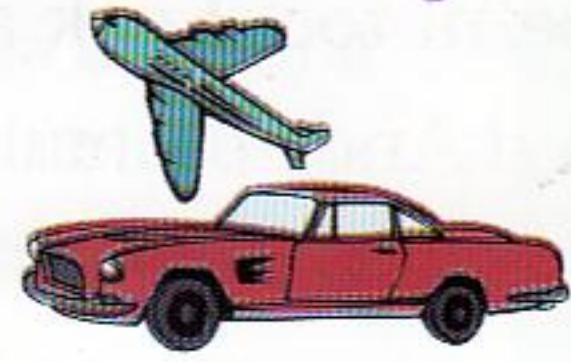
“You're confusing me, Jatin,” said Jeeva, frowning. “I thought plastics were bad.”

“Not always,” replied Jatin. “But we must be careful how we use them and how we put them away. That's all.”

When they reached home, she carefully rolled up all the plastic bags she could find. Then she tied them with a string. “We won't let you fly away again and harm us all,” she told the plastic bags. “You are like the genie in Alladin's lamp. We will tell you what to do and, hereafter, you must work for us!”

Jeeva put the plastic bags away in the storeroom and then shut the door firmly.

- Did you know that the first plastics were made almost a hundred years back?
- Different kinds of plastics are used to make different things like kitchen utensils, telephones, parts of electrical wires, the drainpipes that carry water and sewage, parts of aircraft, car bodies, and other things.
- We throw away several million plastic cups every day! Plastic litter is a big problem all over the world.



SMILE PLEASE!

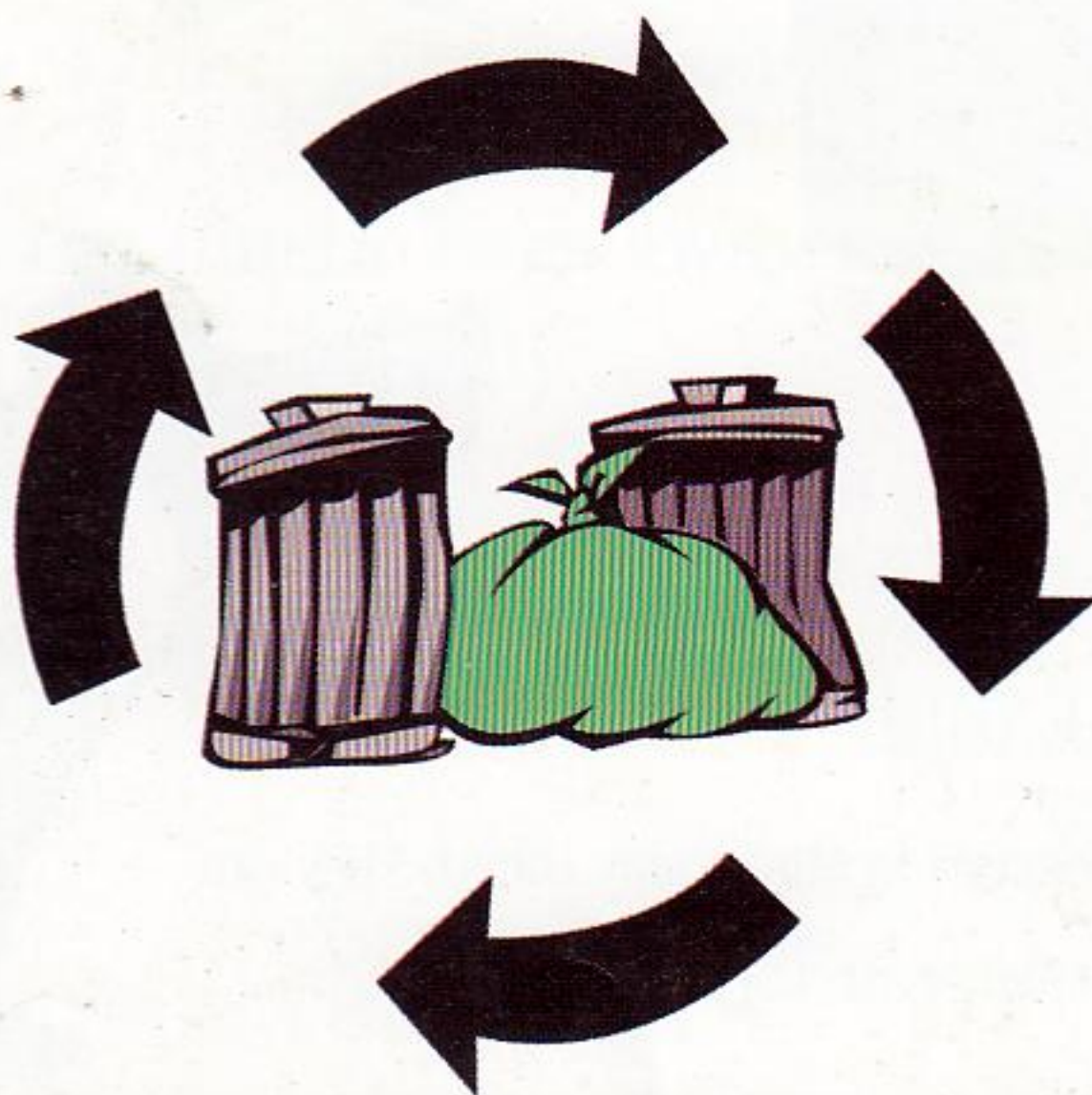
Plastics can be made in almost any colour. They can be as hard as steel or stretch like rubber!

DO SOMETHING!

Plastics are popular because they are light, strong, cheap, easy to clean and waterproof. Plastics have now become so popular and useful that we cannot imagine living without them. But if we do not use them carefully, they can harm us and our environment.

DEFEAT THE PLASTIC PERIL:

- **Reduce:** Where possible, use things made of natural products instead of plastics. For example, carry cloth or jute bags while shopping. Don't accept plastic bags. Use steel, glass and clay cups and plates instead of disposable plastic ones.
- **Reuse:** Reuse plastic bags to store things.
- **Recycle:** Collect all the plastic products you want to throw away. Find out if someone can recycle it and give it to them. Keep plastic waste separate from your kitchen and other natural wastes, and make sure it is properly disposed of.





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∞ Sumathi Sudhakar ∞

Chennai-based writer and editor, Sumathi Sudhakar, has written several books for children, including concept books, story-cum-activity books, picture books and historical novels. She has been a part of the editorial team of *Chandamama*, India's oldest children's magazine. Sumathi has also compiled and edited English and Social Studies textbooks for primary and kindergarten classes, and co-authored *Living in Harmony*, a textbook series published by Oxford University Press, India.

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Without any warning, the evil Plastic Pisach dashes helter-skelter all over the village of Jhilmil! Jeeva and her brother Jatin rush off to catch it, but however fast they run, the Pisach seems to move faster. The children know that plastics are useful but now they find out that they can be really dangerous too. All too soon, Jeeva and Jatin are in big trouble.

Can their friend, Pancharangi the parakeet, save them? Even if they are rescued, will the children find a way to tame the Plastic Pisach?

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